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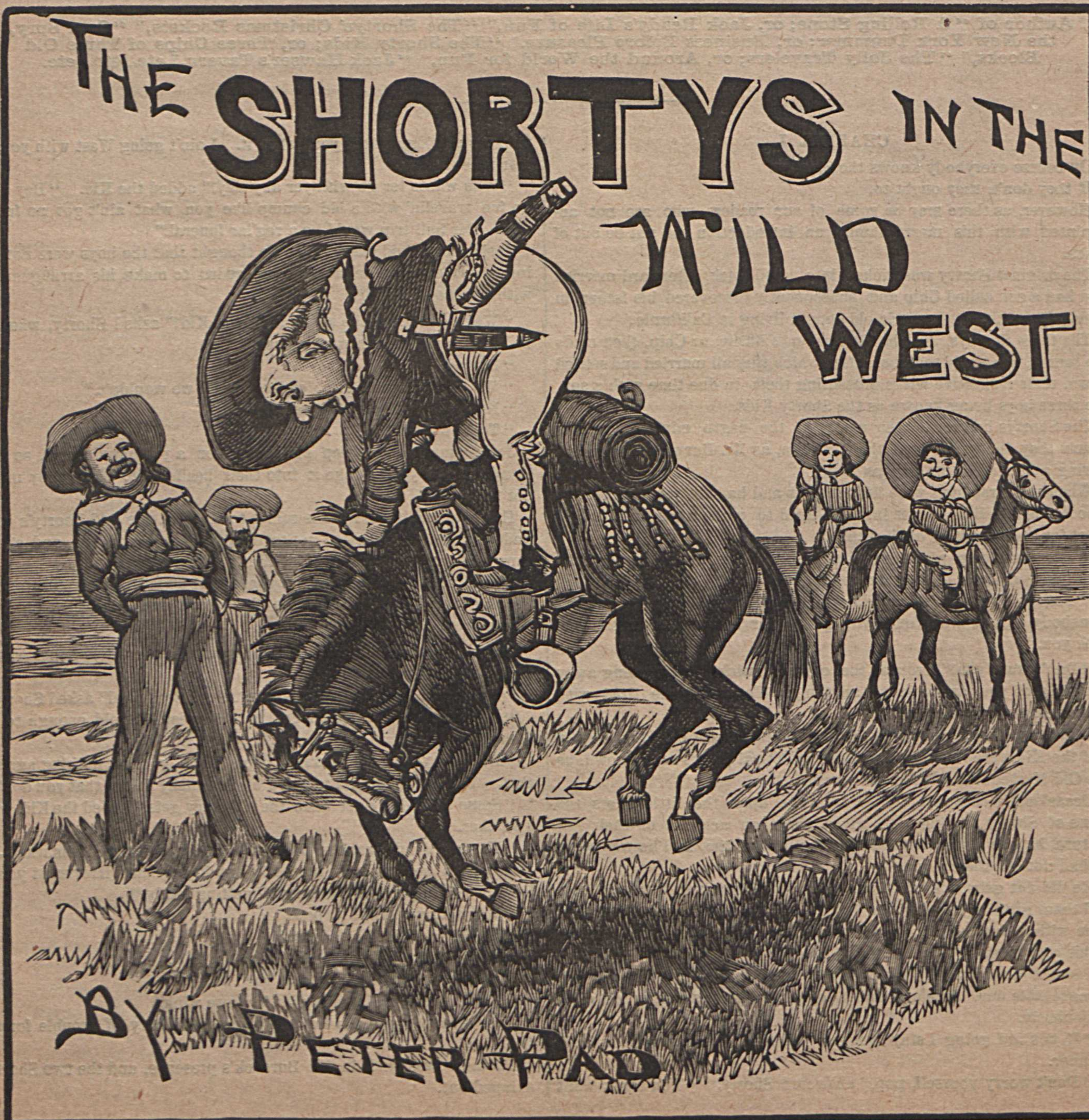
FRANK TOUSEY PUBLISHER, 34 & 36 NORTH MOORE STREET, N. Y.  
NEW YORK, October 10, 1888.

ISSUED EVERY WEDNESDAY.

{ PRICE  
5 CENTS. }

Vol. I

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# THE Shortys in the Wild West.

By PETER PAD,

Author of "A Rolling Stone; or, Jack Ready's Life of Fun," "The Shortys' Christmas Rackets," "Sam Spry, the New York Drummer; or, Business Before Pleasure," "The Shorty Kids; or, Three Chips of Three Old Blocks," "The Jelly Travelers; or, Around the World for Fun," "Jack Hawser's Tavern," etc., etc., etc.

## CHAPTER I.

Of course everybody knows the Shortys.

If they don't, they ought to.

However, as there may be some of our readers who are not acquainted with this merry family, an introduction will not be out of place.

The original Shorty was kicked into good luck, afterward married and had a son called Chip and subsequently discovered his father, in Josiah Burwick, an eccentric old codger living in California.

The three Shortys, Josiah, George and Charlie, or Chip, then made the tour of the world together, after which they all married and settled down, their respective wives presenting them in due time with a son, the three boys being known as the Shorty Kids.

The Shortys had made their money in the negro minstrel business which they finally gave up, the Old Man, as Mr. Burwick was called, having a fortune of his own as well.

When the three boys were little fellows and had not yet been sent to school, the Old Man took it into his head to make a trip to the Wild West for the benefit of his health.

"Take us along with you, pop," said Charles, known as the Kid, "and we'll make it healthy for you and no error."

"Yes, pop," added George, known generally as Shorty, "you need somebody to look after you if you go so far away. Better take us with you."

"Don't want you!" growled the elder Burwick. "I'm going away to get rid of you, as much as anything. You make me tired with your incessant pranks."

It may be stated right here, as well as anywhere else, that Shorty and the Kid were the most inveterate practical jokers ever known, as the Old Man could testify to his sorrow.

Occasionally he would try to retaliate upon the little jokers, the name of Shorty having been given them on account of their low stature, but, as a rule, the boys got the best of him, and he was sorry he had not left them alone.

He did not gain wisdom from experience, however, for every now and then, growing tired of the boys' jokes, he would endeavor to get even with them, sometimes succeeding, but more times being caught in his own trap.

The question of taking them with him on his Western trip was not an agreeable one, therefore, and he opposed Shorty's suggestion most strenuously.

"If you are going I stay at home," he said, in his most emphatic manner.

"Don't worry yourself, pop," answered Shorty. "You never want

to cross a bridge before you get to it. I ain't going West with you, so just take it easy."

"Who wants ter go with yer any way?" added the Kid. "Dey ain't no fun travelin' with a old chump like you, what ain't got no fun in him. Der hull trip would be a reg'lar funeral."

Josiah breathed easier when he thought that the boys were not going to accompany him, and he proceeded to make his arrangements with a tranquil mind.

"We're going, all the same, ain't we, Kid?" asked Shorty, when he and his promising son were alone.

"Bet yer life."

"We won't go with him, 'cause we said we wouldn't."

"No, but we'll get there just the same."

"To be course."

Josiah intended to keep his destination a profound secret, so that in case the boys did take it into their heads to go West, they might not follow him.

However, he intrusted the secret to his wife, she told Shorty's wife, under a particular caution not to divulge it to any one, and she in turn told it to the Kid's wife, with the same injunction.

Of course Shorty and the Kid heard of it under these circumstances, but they held their tongues like little men and kept their plans to themselves.

On the morning of the Old Man's departure, the whole house was in a state of excitement.

"Don't you want us to see you to the station, pop?" asked Shorty.

"Of course not!" snapped Josiah. "Guess I'm old enough to go alone."

"Oh, yes, you're old enough, pop. Nobody says nothing against that. You're old enough to know a good many things that you don't."

"Some folks don't get wiser the older dey gets," added the Kid, with a snicker.

"You can send a hack to the house if you want to," remarked Josiah, with a severe look meant to annihilate that irreverent young joker. "I forgot it in the hurry of getting ready."

"When do you want it, pop?"

"At eleven o'clock—no later."

"All right."

The Kid and Shorty winked at each other.

There was a world of meaning in those winks.

They meant lots of fun for the jokers and plenty of trouble for the Old Man.

No more was said in Mr. Burwick's presence, and the two Shortys skipped out.

Not long before eleven, an ambulance came dashing up the avenue and stopped in front of the Burwick mansion.

The whole Shorty family, wives, kids, servants and all, lived together, and it took a big house to accommodate them.

The appearance of an ambulance in the street, caused a mob of men and boys to congregate within a short space of time.

"Where's the accident?" asked some.

"Who's dead?"

"Let's see him when they put him in the wagon."

The driver of the invalid barouche looked at the number on the Shorty house, jumped out, ran up the steps and rang the bell so that it could be heard all over the neighborhood.

Ginger Jones, Mr. Burwick's footman, butler, and general factotum answered the clamorous summons.

"What yo' want?" he demanded, angrily. "Does yo' 'spect eberybody am deaf dat yo' rung so hahd?"

"Ambulance," said the driver. "Is he ready?"

"Am who ready, sah?"

"I don't know. The man, I suppose."

"What man?"

"The man that's to go in the ambulance, I suppose."

"What fo' yo' sen' de amb'lance?"

"To take the man to the hospital."

"What man?"

"Why, the man that sent for it, I suppose, you blockhead. Come, come, don't keep us waiting, time is precious."

"Don' yo' go fo' to call me out ob my name, sah," said Ginger, indignantly. "I frow yo' down de stoop fo' two cents, and den de amb'lance hab to took yo' away."

Just then the Old Man appeared having heard the ring and thinking that the cab had arrived.

"What's the matter, Ginger?"

"Dis yer man say he got a amb'lance to took yo' to de hospital, sah."

Mr. Burwick frowned.

"It's a mistake. No one wants an ambulance. Who sent you?"

"Call came just now, in a hurry."

"Guess you've made a mistake in the house."

"No, this is the right number."

"Well, well, we don't want—"

At that moment an undertaker's wagon drove up, and a man alighted and ascended the stoop.

"This Mr. Burwick's?" he asked, in a business like tone.

"Yes," said the astonished Mr. Burwick.

"I am from Black, the funeral outfitters, he sent me around to lay out Mr. Burwick."

"I'll lay you out!" stormed Josiah. "I'm Mr. Burwick! Do I look as if I needed the services of an under—"

"Manager of funerals," interrupted the man. "Our profession has discarded the use of so characterless a term."

"Well, I'll discard you," cried Josiah. "Who in the mischief—"

Just then there came another interruption.

It was in the form of a big junk wagon drawn by an old blind nag.

A ragged, rough-looking fellow got off the seat, came up the stoop and said:

"Is it here the lot of junk was to be taken to the deppo? Have ye it ready? Here I am."

"No, there's no junk to go away. Who sent you?"

"Maybe it's rags, then?"

"No, it isn't rags."

"Well, it's here I was to come and if I've been made a fool of, somebody has got to pay for the loss of my time."

Before Josiah could find words to sufficiently express his indignation, another wagon stopped in front of the house.

"Is this where the calf was to be sent to the slaughter-house from?" asked the driver, coming up the steps.

The Old Man suddenly took a big drop.

This was the work of his son and grandson.

Nobody else could have sent all these people to the house.

"Get out!" he howled to the gang on the doerstep. "I don't want an ambulance, nor an undertaker's wagon, nor a junk cart, nor a butcher's dray. I want a cab!"

"I'll take you, boss!" cried all the men at once.

"Ginger, turn on the hose!"

That indignant coon hustled the junkman and the butcher down those steps in short order. The ambulance driver returned to his carriage without assistance, but the manager of funerals seemed disposed to argue the case.

"If you don't get out of here I'll give your employer a job that you won't know anything about!" cried Mr. Burwick wrathfully.

"But my dear sir, when an order is given, it is our duty to—"

"Ginger!" cried Josiah, to the returning moke.

"Yas, sah."

Josiah indicated the troublesome conductor of obsequies by a wave of his thumb.

The next minute the gentleman in question felt himself propelled with no gentle force down the steps.

When he picked himself up the door was shut and his assailant had vanished.

"If I thought it was the old gentleman, I wouldn't care very much," he remarked, "but to be fired out by a nigger is something I won't stand."

At that instant Ginger appeared at the basement door.

"Wha' dat yo' say 'bout niggahs, sah?" he asked.

The undertaker's man said nothing, but jumped into his wagon and drove away in a great hurry.

At eleven o'clock, sharp, only a few moments afterward, wheels were heard in front of the house.

Ginger was going to be prepared for the jokers on this occasion.

Ding-ding!

At the very moment that the bell rang, that wrathful coon was on the stoop.

"Fool me again, will yo'?" he cried, smashing somebody's high hat over his eyes.

"Hould on; phwat do yez mane be that?" cried a voice from under the hat.

It was the cab driver who spoke.

He had arrived promptly in time.

"Fo' goodness sakes, ef it ain't de coach wha' de ole ge'men sen' fo'!" cried Ginger. "Dat am a mistake fo' sho'."

Then he dashed inside, and in a moment Josiah came out.

The delay had given the cabman time to get out of his crushed hat.

"Insult a gentleman, will you?" he cried, taking Mr. Burwick in the stomach the instant he appeared.

Josiah sat down in the vestibule with considerable more haste than grace.

"What do you mean, sir?" he gasped, when he could get his wind.

"Oh, murther, it's a mistake I med, intoirely. Are ye the gintleman that wor to go to the dippot? Faix, I niver meant no harrum. I thought it wor the naygur who belted me over the head."

The ladies now appeared and Josiah got into the carriage, his trunk was put on and away he went to the Grand Central station.

Shorty and the Kid were there and saw him buy his ticket for St. Louis, though he saw nothing of them.

"We'll have some fun out of the ole duffer, even if we don't go with him," chuckled Shorty, as the train went out.

"Well I should whisper."

## CHAPTER II.

MR. BURWICK fondly imagined as he bowled along that he had gotten rid of Shorty and the Kid, and that his destination was unknown to them.

That was where he fooled himself twice.

They not only knew where he was going, but they meant to meet him later on and see the fun out.

It would take a couple of days to get to St. Louis, and they did not want to follow immediately, as then their wives would suspect something.

Late the next day, however, Shorty suddenly announced that he and Charlie were going to Texas for their health.

"I don't believe a word of it," said Shorty's wife to Josiah's wife, who, by the way, was her own daughter. "George is going West just to bother your grandfather."

"He isn't my grandfather; he's my husband."

"Well, he's George's father, and of course he's mine, and I'm your mother, and that makes him your—"

"Oh, for goodness' sakes don't bring up those awful relationships again!" cried Angie, Josiah's wife. "I don't know if I'm my own grandmother, or aunt, or what."

It may be stated that Shorty had married a widow, the Kid had soon after wedded the elder daughter of the same, and the Old Man had subsequently been united to the younger daughter, which caused their several relations to one another to be most inextricably mixed up—a condition of things that was not at all improved by the subsequent appearance of three little strangers in the household.

"No, we won't talk about that," said Mrs. George, "but we ought to let Mr. Burwick know that George and Charlie are going to follow him."

"Yes, I think so, too."

Meantime the Old Man was getting on first rate, having left Chicago for St. Louis, which he expected to reach the next day.

When he arrived in St. Louis the Old Man left the train, and was about to call a hack when a mysterious-looking man stepped up, placed one hand upon his shoulder, and said:

"Make no resistance, sir, but come along quietly if you know what is good for you."

The Old Man dropped his hand-bag, and gazed at the speaker in the greatest astonishment.

"What do you mean?" he gasped.

"You are my prisoner, so don't make any fuss."

"Your prisoner? What am I your prisoner for, I'd like to know?"

Another man came up at this moment, and said to the first:

"If he gives you any trouble hit him on the head."

"What is the meaning of this outrage?" demanded Josiah, angrily.

"I won't stir a step unless——"

"Ah, come on!" and both men grabbed him, and hustled him along the platform.

"Let go of me!" yelled Josiah, trying to get away.

"Yes, we will—in our minds!" and now another man came up with Josiah's bag in his hands, and assisted the others.

Then all three hustled the Old Man out of the station and into a close carriage, his toilet being considerably deranged by the operation.

No amount of sputtering or struggling could avail him, however, for he was bundled in, and while one man sat upon him another put a pair of steel bracelets on his wrists.

"It'll be all the worse for you if you make any more trouble," growled the third man. "You runaway cashiers are too fresh these days."

"I haven't run away, I am taking a trip for the benefit of my health."

"That's what they all say. You couldn't stand the confinement, I suppose? Well, you'll have to stand it, that's all."

"I tell you there is some mistake. I am Josiah Burwick of New York, and——"

"You needn't say any more. That just gives you away. We've had your description and alias sent to us and we know all about you."

"I haven't any alias. I am Josiah Burwick——"

"The runaway cashier of the Hell Gate National Bank. We know you, so you'd better shut up and not give yourself away."

Poor Josiah was at a loss for words to express his feelings.

"I tell you it's a mistake," he finally managed to say.

"Oh, of course. You ought to have went to Canada, hey? That's a mistake you fellows sometimes make."

Josiah said no more, for the carriage was rattling over the pavements, and conversation was rendered very difficult.

Finally they stopped, and Mr. Burwick was taken out and led into a big building, where there were a lot of men dressed in blue, with brass buttons and shields, and an air of great consequence about them.

"Well, detectives, what have you got there?" asked the most consequential man of the lot.

"Bank cashier, run away with a lot of money, we arrested him on the strength of dispatches from New York."

"Ah, indeed; what is his name?"

"Burwick, of the Hell Gate National Bank of New York. He got away with half a million."

"Oh, yes, that's the fellow that was telegraphed about?"

"Yes."

"It's a mistake, I tell you," muttered Josiah.

"What is your name?" asked the boss of the place, which was police headquarters.

"Josiah Burwick, but I never was in ——"

"H'm! we had a telegram about you this morning. Would you like to hear it?"

"Yes."

The chief then read the following dispatch:

"JOSIAH BURWICK, Esq.,—The boys are following you. Better go to Texas. ANGIE."

"H'm! that's from my wife."

"Your wife, hey? That'll do. The boys are following you, hey? That means the police, of course."

"It does not! It means my son and grandson."

"H'm! that might be all right, but we got a telegram just before which makes this one more important. Shall I read it?"

Josiah nodded, and the chief read the following:

"To the Chief of Police, St. Louis, Mo:

"Arrest man calling himself Josiah Burwick. Is cashier of Hell Gate National Bank of this city, and has absconded with half a million. Is short and fat, and very bald. Real name John Short. Is bound for the West. Will send particulars."

"BARNES, Inspector."

"New York, June 18."

"What do you say to that?" asked the astute chief.

The Old Man was too mad to say anything.

Before he had made up his mind to speak, he was yanked off and locked up in a cell.

Then it was too late, for nobody would listen to him.

He was kept locked up for twenty-four hours, and then brought out for examination.

"It's all right, sir," said the chief. "You are not the man we thought."

"I guess I ain't!" stormed the Old Man. "Don't you know there is no Hell Gate National Bank in New York?"

"Yes, we have learned as much."

"And the chief of police is not Barnes at all, but Bynes?"

"So we have found out. You can go."

This was said so coolly that Josiah got madder than ever.

"I am a respectable retired citizen of New York, traveling for my health."

"Yes, so they said. We won't charge you anything for telegraphing, seeing that you are innocent."

"Oh, you won't!" howled Mr. Burwick.

"No, though we usually do."

"Well, if you haven't got the most cheek of any one I ever saw."

"You can go," said the chief, suavely.

"Oh, I can, eh? Well, I'll make it hot for you, see if I don't. My arrest and detention were illegal, sir, and——"

"Oh, yes, we know all about that, Mr. Burwick. Pretty good joke, wasn't it? That son of yours—Shorty, I believe they call him—must be a terror."

"Shorty!" echoed Josiah.

Then he caught on.

So it was Shorty who had invented the Hell Gate Bank and all the rest of the business?

"I wonder how he found out where I was going?" he said, aloud.

"Bribed a messenger boy, I guess," said the chief, "or maybe the women told each other in strict confidence. There would be no trouble in finding out everything after that."

"H'm! I should say not. I ought to have kept it to myself."

"Your interesting son was here this morning," said one of the detectives who had made the arrest.

"He was, eh? Then I'll take my wife's advice and go to Texas."

All the officers laughed, and Josiah was forced to join them.

He took his valise, called a carriage, drove to a hotel, sent for his trunk, had breakfast, and then dispatched this telegram to his wife:

"Leave for San Antonio in the morning."

"JOSIAH."

"H'm! Let me see Shorty catch me after that!" he muttered to himself.

Now it so happened that Shorty and the Kid, while keeping out of

sight, had made it worth the while of the telegraph operator in the hotel to give them copies of all the messages the Old Man sent out.

Consequently they knew where he was going, and when he reached Texas they were there ahead of him.

Here they made the acquaintance of a cowboy called Arizona Charlie whom they filled full of their schemes, together with a liberal supply of liquor, and by the time the Old Man reached town the conspiracy was ripe.

We won't describe San Antonio, for you can get all the facts in any gazeteer, but will merely say that its principal features consisted in men in red shirts, gambling houses, one story buildings, hot weather, greasers, cowboys, whisky and ranchoeros.

Josiah put up at a house called a hotel by courtesy, and began to cast his eyes around him.

He soon made the acquaintance of a ranchman called Texas Jake, and also that of his partners, Nevada Mike, Blue-nosed Jim, Arizona Charlie and others, whose names we need not designate.

"Down here for yer health, hey, Mr. Burwick?" asked Jake, one day.

"Yes."

"Wall, I tell ye what ye do. Me and the boys is going down onto the plains in a day or so after cattle. Wouldn' yer like to come?"

"Well, now that would just suit me. The free life of the woods and prairies is what I have long wanted to lead."

"Wall, then, you just come with us, and we'll make a new man of ye in a week."

"I think I will."

"You'll want a outfit, 'cause you'll want to look just like the rest on us. The boys will fix all that."

"You go out prepared to stay some time, I suppose?"

"Yes, we go into camp in regular style, with wagons and tents, and all that, and you'll be as cozy as if you was in your own house."

"H'm, more so, I guess," remarked Josiah. "There won't be any Shorty or the Kid to bother me here."

"Who's them?" asked Jake, with a smile, and Josiah told him.

"Wall, that Shorty must be a most amoosin' little cuss," he remarked, "and I'd like a heap to make his acquaintance."

"You'd soon wish you hadn't," observed Josiah.

A day or so were spent in getting an outfit, and at last Mr. Burwick looked as much like a cowboy as any of his friends.

One night Arizona Charlie came to him and said:

"Wall, old pard, we leave yer in the morning. Ain't ye kind o' joyful?"

"Yes, I am, indeed," said the Old Man. "Now for the plains and a life of freedom."

"Now you're shoutin', pard, but you forgot to mention the fun we'll have."

Oh, yes, he was going to have lots of that!

### CHAPTER III.

TEXAS JAKE and his party left town the next day for the cattle country, and the Old Man went along.

He rode a mustang, wore big boots, a red shirt and a wide-brimmed hat, and would have made quite a fine-looking cowboy, had he not been so short and so fat.

"We'll make a right smart cow puncher of you afore we fetch you home again, Mr. Burwick," said Jake. "Reckon yer own folks won't know ye."

"I hardly think they would now," answered Josiah.

"Oh, you're a Jim dandy, pard," said a big, raw-boned fellow, who bore the appellation of Arizona Charlie, slapping the Old Man on the back, and nearly knocking the wind out of him. "You're away up, you are, only it's too bad you went too much to stump and didn't send out some branches."

Josiah always resented any allusion to his shortness, and answered somewhat testily with that old chestnut:

"Precious goods are always done up in small parcels, my elongated friend."

"Yas, and so's poison," was Charlie's quick response.

The Old Man then wished that he hadn't used that time-worn expression.

However, he got on first-rate with Jake and Charlie, and Nevada

Mike and Blue Nose Jim and all the other cowboys, in a short time, finding them all jolly fellows, ready to do him a kindness at the slightest provocation.

He enjoyed the fresh, bracing air, the freedom of plain life, the riding, the scenery and all that, and thought he would like that sort of thing to last forever.

"New York is all very well for club men and men of fashion," he observed, "but for real, actual life, give me Texas every time. Here I am not on the lookout for practical jokes all the time."

"What with wagons and mules and hard roads and the rest, the caravan did not make very much progress that day, and when night came they were not more than twenty miles from where they started.

The country was wild enough to suit the most ardent admirer of the beauties of nature, however, and Josiah had used up a large stock of adjectives in trying to describe it.

The distant mountains, the winding river, the fertile plains, the clumps of trees marking the presence of little water courses, all impressed him exceedingly, and he could not find words enough to express his admiration.

The mustang he rode was quiet and easy, with a back like a car-seat, so that the Old Man felt no more fatigue at the end of the day than if he had only been out for a long walk.

"This is the kind of life for me," he remarked for the fiftieth time as he sat down on a box, watching the preparations for supper.

The wagons and horses were corralled in a circle at the bottom of a little valley where there was a stream and a clump of trees, a big fire was made, and the corporation cook got to work at once.

The odor of boiling coffee, frying bacon and baking corn-cakes just tickled the Old Man's palate the best they were capable of, for he was as hungry as a horse, and anything would have smelled good.

He did full justice to the meal and put away twice as much as his usual supply, feeling as if he could never get enough.

He cared nothing for having to eat out of a tin plate balanced on his lap, or of dispensing with the use of forks, or of taking his coffee out of a tin cup, feeling just then that the usages of polite society were all shams, and that this was the only way to live.

Hunger and a vigorous appetite makes a man stand almost anything and Mr. Burwick was no exception to the universal rule.

He had finally succeeded in filling himself up, and was leaning back gazing composedly about him, when there was a sudden commotion in camp.

Two little fellows came riding in on a couple of dandy horses, and were at once greeted by Texas Jake, Arizona Charlie, Nevada Mike, Blue Nosed Jim and the whole crowd, with the utmost ostentation.

Josiah looked, gave a second glance, could hardly believe the evidence of his senses, squinted once more, and finally made up his mind, with a sigh, that he had been right in the beginning.

Shorty and the Kid!

That's who the new-comers were for a fact.

They were dressed like all the rest, used big saddles, wore broad-brimmed slouched hats, carried miniature cannons in their belts, and looked as if they had just stepped out of the pages of a dime novel.

There was no mistaking their comical mugs, however, and the Old Man sighed and put down his head.

"Hello, pop, you here!" cried Shorty, evidently in the greatest astonishment.

"Why, if it ain't the Ole Man!" echoed the Kid.

"I say, pard, this old gentleman is my father," said Shorty to Jake. "Why didn't you tell me you had him along?"

"Yes, sir, that's der Ole Man, der father of all der Shortys," said the Kid. "Well, well, dis is a surprise. How are you, grandpop?"

"Pretty well, thank you, Charlie," answered Josiah Burwick, Esq. "I didn't expect to see you, though."

"Why, that's funny, pop. We didn't expect to see you, either. Thought you was going to Denver."

"Oh, I changed my mind," said Josiah.

"Well, dat's lucky, pop, for now you've got some fellers to look after you."

"After you lighted out we thought we'd take a trip, too," said Shorty. "Funny we met you way out here in der Wild West, wasn't it?"

"Glad to see us, ain't you, pop? All these fellows is our friends, too, and that's as funny as der rest."

"Why, yes, we've knowed Jake and Charlie and der hull gang a long time, but we never knowed you was coming, did we, dad?"

"Course not. It's a reg'lar surprise all the way around."

The Old Man rather doubted this statement, but it was easier to believe it than prove it false, and so he accepted the situation.

"I've a good mind to go right back and go somewhere else by myself," he muttered, as Shorty and the Kid sat down to supper with Texas Jake and the cook.

He had his reasons for this step, and cogent ones, too.

"I'll just bet that those boys had something to do with getting me down here," he mused. "They wanted to have a chance to play their everlasting jokes on me, and I was just donkey enough to walk into the trap."

"Surprised to see me, indeed! Yes! They would have been more surprised if they hadn't seen me, the rascals. If it wasn't so far I'd go back this very night and fool them."

Shorty and the Kid, meanwhile, were putting away a square meal, and amusing the cowboys at the same time by telling them funny stories.

Presently the Old Man found himself listening, and before long he was laughing as heartily as any of them.

The boys knew how to work things, and they did not play the first bit of a joke on him that night or all the next day.

They had been intending to join the party all along they said, but had been delayed and were prevented from getting off at the start, and that was how they had not known that the Old Man was there.

This was true enough as far as it went, but Shorty somehow neglected to say that he and the Kid had purposely kept out of the way until the party had started in order that the Old Man could not back out.

They made more progress the next day, and by evening were not so very far away from the cow country, and began to be on the lookout for herds.

Shorty and the Kid went off for a jaunt on their ponies after supper, returning just before sunset with Jake and Jim.

Arizona Charlie had a couple of bucking bronchos of the most pronounced type, which the Prince of Darkness himself could hardly ride, and Shorty knew all about them.

They were quiet-looking beasts enough to look at, but Heaven help the fellow who tried to ride them when they once got a tantrum into their heads.

Shorty's little excursion after supper had been made for the purpose of talking about those same bronchos, which stood, all saddled and bridled, at one side of the inclosure.

"I say, pop, don't you want to go for a ride?" asked Shorty, as he drew rein near where the Old Man sat gazing at the fire.

"Why, there isn't time, is there?" returned Josiah, thoughtfully. "It'll be dark pretty soon."

"Oh, no, it won't. There's your nag all ready. Jump on and come for a spin of a few miles. It'll settle your supper."

"Why, that's not my horse, George," muttered the Old Man, leading out one of the buckers.

The nag made not the least show of resistance, and was apparently as docile as a saw-horse itself.

"Never mind dat, pop. He'll do I guess. He's slow enough for you to ride."

"Yes, he doesn't look as if he could go more than a mile an hour."

"Get on, pop," said the Kid, sitting astride his own animal. "We'll have lots of fun."

Josiah ought to have taken warning from those words, but he didn't. Texas Jake gave the Old Man a hoist and helped him into the saddle, after which he very wisely stepped aside.

"Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha."

That's what the broucho said first, in the shrillest of tones.

Then he let fly with his hind heels, and if there had been anything at about twelve feet from the ground when those heels flew up, it would have gone to everlasting smash.

At the next minute he pitched forward, and Josiah was nearly thrown off.

"Whoa!" he yelled, letting go of the reins and grabbing the brute by the mane.

Then that docile creature began to buck in the highest style known to the art.

Only those who have been on the back of one of these ugly brutes can describe the emotions as well as the motions, which followed.

The horse was in the air and on the ground, heels up, head down, vice versa, and every other way, all at once.

He hoisted up his back, put all his feet together, and sent Josiah flying up in the air, two feet above the saddle, in a twinkling.

The Old Man yelled, Shorty and the Kid chuckled, while Texas Jake and the cowboys just let themselves go for all they knew how.

"Whoa!" grunted the Old Man, as he came down upon the saddle with a thump.

The gentle animal gave him another bounce and then went racing all round the camp with him at the top of his speed.

Josiah hung on like grim death, but suddenly and without the slightest warning, the broncho stopped, threw down his head and planted his fore feet firmly together.

It was lucky for the Old Man that the vicious brute had paused near one of the wagons.

Away he flew through the air like a bald-headed comet flying in at the tail end of the wagon at lightning speed.

He fetched up against a lot of blankets or his neck would have been broken as true as preaching.

As it was, he was considerably shaken up, though no bones were broken.

In a few minutes, when he had recovered his breath, he crawled out of the wagon, dropped to the ground and looked around him.

There stood that broncho, quietly grazing and looking as innocent as you please.

The Old Man stared at him in dumb amazement, and then shaking his fist angrily, he cried in wrath:

"Ugh! you ugly brute. If I owned you I'd have you knocked on the head and boiled into glue mighty quick."

A roar from all hands greeted this explosion, and Texas Jake remarked:

"Why, he's as quiet as a lamb. He wouldn't hurt nothing."

"Course not," added Arizona Charlie with a grin.

"I'd like to see you ride him, then," snapped Josiah.

"All right, pard, you shell, if yer wanten."

With that Charlie sprang on the brute's back and drove him around the camp.

He did not cut up as badly as he had with Mr. Burwick, but he was bad enough in all conscience.

However, he could not shake or throw Charlie off, and after a time, he got tired of his tantrums and wanted to stop.

"Had enough, hey?" laughed the cowboy, jumping off. "Wall, pard," to Mr. Burwick, "ye see it's jest as I told ye. That critter's as easy to ride as a cow."

"H'm! he may be to you," answered the Old Man, with a grunt.

"I'd rather you would ride him than I."

Then turning to where Shorty and the Kid still sat on their horses, looking as solemn as owls, he sputtered out:

"You knew all about that brute's tricks, you young rascals!"

"Oh, pop! wisher may die if I ever—"

"We? Why, how can you say so, Ole Man?"

Oh, yes, they were awfully innocent—in looks.

"Any one'd be took in by the looks of that nag, pop."

"Why, you'd think he couldn't hurt a fly to see him now, grand-pop."

"He is like some other fellows I know—not as innocent as he looks," snorted the Old Man as he walked off to his wagon.

Then Shorty and the Kid traded winks.

"Ain't yer glad yer come, dad?"

"Cert, for der guv'nor needs somebody to look after him."

"And we're just der fellers, hey, pop?"

"Bet yer life!"

#### CHAPTER IV.

EVERYTHING was quiet in the camp of the cowboys.

Afar off the gentle gurgle of the river could be heard, while near at hand the tranquil swish of the trees made itself manifest.

The moon was taking a snooze behind a mass of clouds, and the little stars were too lazy to come out and twinkle.

The air was just cool enough to provoke somnolency, and all hands were doing great things in the way of napping.

The horses were grazing quietly, or lying down just outside the camp, where a silent sentinel sat dozing on a cracker-box.

The scene was just loaded up with solid chunks of romance, and the Old Man ought by rights to have been up to enjoy it.

He wasn't, though.

Instead of being rapt with emotions, he was wrapped in a big blanket under a wagon, and was snoring for all he was worth.

He had left Shorty and the Kid conversing with Texas Jake, and enjoying a cheerful smoke, feeling safe from their jokes as long as they were thus employed.

He was a little too hitherto, however, in his notions of being safe.

Even at that moment they were hatching up some heinous offense against him.

However, we won't be too anterior ourselves, but let the story take its own course.

Josiah had entered the second lap of his snooze when his ears were suddenly startled by a series of ear-piercing shrieks.

"Injuns!" was the one word that he could distinguish amid the tumult.

It was as good as a thousand and brought him to his feet in a jiffy.

He gave his cocoanut a whack against the bottom of the wagon, and then he concluded that he had better lie still.

If he ran out the Indians would be sure to nab him.

If he remained where he was, however, he might escape detection in the confusion.

His heart thumped against his ribs like a sledge hammer on an anvil, but he kept still and scarcely breathed.

The yelling and howling was going on all around him, and now and then he could hear shots as though the fiercest kind of a battle were raging.

Suddenly the wagon under which he was ensconced, was run off and he was left by himself.

Then a dozen howling forms swooped down upon him, he was snatched up and in a second was thrown upon a pony and hurried off quicker than scat.

"Help," he yelled. "George, Charlie, the savages have got——"

"No make so much heap noise," growled a man on the saddle behind him, clapping a big paw over his mouth.

The Old Man was forced to be silent, and he trembled in his boots when he thought of the fate awaiting him.

Carried off by Indians!

The thought was sickening!

What would they do with him?

Scalp him?

There wouldn't be any satisfaction in that.

His bald poll would be neither ornamental nor useful to the belt of a painted savage.

They might burn him at the stake, though, and that was as bad as being barbered by the red villains.

A whole lot of cheerful imaginings scudded through his brain in that mad ride.

Once or twice he tried to yell, but his fellow rider cuffed him on the ear at every attempt, and he finally concluded that the time for a speech on his part had not yet arrived.

In the dim light around him he could see several horsemen, all galloping like mad, and by their plumed top-knots he knew that they were all redskins.

Fainter and fainter grew the cries in the rear, and at last they died out altogether.

"Oh, dear, oh, dear!" he sighed, "what a fate! I wish I had never come here. I wonder if George and Charlie were captured, too? If they were it's all up with me."

"Shut up, no make so heap big gab," growled the man behind him.

Once more Josiah dried up, while the pony continued to dash forward at a maddening gallop.

Finally the whole party halted at the edge of a little grove.

Josiah was dragged off the pony, and lugged away to a cleared place in the middle of the wood.

Here there was a stake in the ground as big as the trunk of an oak tree.

To this the unfortunate Mr. Burwick was bound with about forty fathoms of stout rope, till he could not move hand nor foot.

Next his captors proceeded to pile up dry wood and rubbish of all kinds till it reached above his head.

"Oh, dear! I'm going to be roasted," he groaned. "Why did I ever come out to this horrible country?"

No one answered his conundrum, the savages withdrawing to the other side of the clearing.

Here a fire was lighted, and Josiah could see through the chinks in his wood pile, that the noble red men were having the dandiest kind of a time.

They were roasting meat on the coals, passing around black bottles, yelling and singing at the top of their voices, and evidently preparing themselves for a high old jollification.

"The wretches!" growled Josiah. "They haven't any more heart than a stone."

The longer he stood there the more hilarious the gang became, and new arrivals were coming in all the time.

The crowd around the fire grew larger, and finally all hands fell to and had a bully old feast, the whisky bottle circulating as freely as the contribution box at a camp-meeting.

After a couple of hours of this sort of business, the reds stretched themselves around the fire and went to sleep, leaving Josiah still tied to the stake.

"The brutes!" he growled. "If they weren't going to burn me right away they might have let me lie down and take a nap instead of keeping me here on my feet nearly smothered under a wood pile."

The savages evidently thought otherwise, however, as they left him where he was, all ready for roasting, and never came near him.

When morning came, the gang suddenly awoke all at once, and the little grove was a scene of the greatest activity and bustle.

All the savages were on their feet, and a hideous lot they were, and no mistake.

They were painted all the colors of the rainbow, they wore striped blankets, buckskins, military coats, and all sorts of things, and danced and jumped about like so many demons.

They all had feathers in their heads, but the leader wore an old plug hat with a whisk broom stuck in the top of it, both articles being recognized by Josiah as belonging to himself.

The whole party went dancing and yelling around Josiah, who took no interest whatever in the proceedings.

After yelling and prancing about half a dozen times, the din growing louder every instant, half the gang suddenly ran to the fire and came rushing back with glowing torches in their hands.

The Old Man's heart sank away down to the toes of his boots.

The sacrifice was about to eventuate.

Just, then, however, there came an interruption.

With a yell and a clatter of hoofs on the turf, a dozen cowboys dashed into the grove and made straight for the yelling Indians.

Shorty and the Kid were in the rescuing party, and were shouting louder than all the rest.

"Saved!" howled Shorty, drawing a bead on the party who wore the Old Man's hat.

The Indians dusted, and then Texas Jake rode up and began tearing aside the woodpile.

The boys all assisted him, and in a short time Josiah was free, with the exception that he was still tied to the stake.

Then he had another surprise party.

The cowboys dismounted, joined hands with the savages who had suddenly returned, and the whole caboodle began executing a war dance around the Old Man.

As they skipped around the Indians made some very decided changes in their toilet.

They discarded their feathers, threw aside their blankets, put away their horse-hair wigs and rubbed the paint off their faces.

It did not take long to change them from howling savages to laughing cowboys, which was just what they were.

In fact, there wasn't an Indian in the whole gang, nor within forty miles either, for that matter.

Shorty, the Kid, Texas Jake, Arizona Charlie, Nevada Mike, and the whole crowd went dancing around the Old Man, all yelling like furies.

"How do you like it, pop?"

"Beats any dime novel yarn you ever heard, don't it?"

"Thrillin' rescue from Injuns! Fine, ain't it, Mr. Burwick?"

"Scare the kids when yer tell it, won't it, dad?"

Josiah took a sudden and very decided tumble.

His capture by the nomadic tribes of the Wild West was all a hoax.

His miraculous escape from a horrible death was nothing but a fairy tale.

His terrible sufferings at the hands of the merciless Indians was all stuff.

The Indians were his own friends, and the whole thing was a grand guy.

Anybody else would have discovered it at the start.

It took an earthquake to make Josiah drop to anything, and he did not always do it then.

Now, however, he had got on to the snap.

He was mad, too.

"Cut these ropes!" he blustered. "Let me get out of this! I'm going right away home."

Then he began to gesticulate wildly, and all at once the ropes fell in a heap at his feet.

He could have shaken them off at any moment if he had only known it.

The wood pile had prevented this, but after that the ropes merely hung upon his limbs.

This discovery did not assuage his wrath, however.

If anything it rather increased when he found out how badly he had been sold.

He stepped over the ropes and strode angrily toward the edge of the clearing.

"I don't expect anything else from those two little rascals," he snorted, indicating Shorty and Charlie, "but I did think that the rest of you were gentlemen. I find that I was mistaken."

A grand laugh greeted this outburst and Josiah hurried into the grove, boiling over with indignation.

He ran plump into a lot of bushes before he knew where he was going, he was so mad, and then he caught his foot in a trailing vine and sprawled full length on the ground.

He finally recovered himself and sailed off in high dudgeon, reaching the edge of the prairie only to meet with another surprise.

Here were the wagons, mules, bronchos and everything else that belonged to the party.

They had shifted their camp in the early morning so as to be on hand for the grand rescue.

The whole business had been well planned and dandily carried out, the result being a first-class bamboozle for the Old Man.

"I do wish I could find one lot of men that did not want to be forever playing pranks on each other," he sputtered, as he stood on the edge of the wood.

"Don't think you'll find 'em, pop," said Shorty, who had come up behind him as he stood there.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," sputtered the Old Man, going off toward the wagon where he kept his things.

"So I are, pop, but I come to tell you that grub was ready if you was hungry."

"Go soak your head!" answered that mad Old Man.

## CHAPTER V.

THE day after the Old Man's adventure with Indians was spent in the usual way, the party getting nearer the regions where they would be likely to find cattle.

Josiah had a rod in pickle for Shorty and the Kid, and had made up his mind to pay them off for the scare they had given him.

He determined to take Texas Jake into his confidence thinking that between them they could work up a dandy snap on the boys.

Somehow or other the Old Man never seemed to learn wisdom from experience.

He confessed his grievance to the cowboy, and asked for his sympathy.

Jake gave it to him, of course.

"It's a goldurned shame the way them boys treats you, sir," said Jake.

"Yes, but if I can get hunk on them it's all right."

"Wall, I'd know but what it might be," answered Jake, earnestly. He was in sympathy with the Old Man, of course.

In a horn he was.

He just took in all that the elder Burwick said, and then at the first chance, told Shorty and the Kid the whole business.

He knew that there was more fun to be had by taking sides with the boys than with hitching up to Josiah.

"We'll give him a snap dat'll make his hair curl," chuckled Shorty.

"He ain't got none, dad," put in the Kid.

"Dat's so; well, we'll give him one dat'll make the hair come out then."

"It came out long ago, dad. Der guv'nor's been shiny on der top of his head long as I kin remember."

"Well, we'll fetch it back again den, if dat satisfies you."

"It takes the cheese, dad," and Texas Jake just howled to see those two jokers wink.

"There's as much fun in you two fellers as there is in a young mule, durned if they ain't," he remarked vigorously.

"Bet yer life, pard, but yer never see us kick."

"I wonder the old one hain't swopped yer off long ago fur a yaller dog or a coyote, or suthin'."

"So he would, but then he'd have to kill the dog, and he hasn't got the spunk to do that."

"Soy, Gawgy, what'll it be?" the Kid now put in.

"Something with bitters and a little sugar in it, Kiddy, if you please."

"Naw, I didn't mean that."

"Oh, didn't yer? Thought you was going to treat."

"Naw, I meant what would it be on the Old Man."

"Just hold your hosses, sonny, and me and Jake'll fix up a daisy. You'll know time enough what it is."

"All kerect, pop. Just call on the subscriber when you need any help."

"You won't be left out, bub, so you needn't be alarmed."

The Kid's assistance in thinking up the snap was just as necessary, however, as in carrying out the same, and the three conspirators were soon in consultation.

It was well along in the afternoon when the party halted, one of the cowboys who had been ahead suddenly dashing up with the remark:

"Yaller Jim's gang is up in the mountains, pard, an' it's 'bout time we done suthin'."

"You don't say," cried Texas Jake. "Did ye see the critter?"

"No, but I smelled him, and I reckon he seed us from his lookout long afore this."

"Wall, I 'low we'd better stop and wait for him," said Arizona Charlie. "If he wants to say anything we'd better let him say it when we have the whip-hand."

"They ain't no peskier critter in all the Son'west 'n that feller an' his gang," added Blue-Nosed Jim.

"The wuss lot o' cut-throats I ever see," chimed in Nevada Mike.

"What sort of a bloke is he?" asked Shorty, showing a good deal of interest.

"Reg'lar cow puncher, that's wot he is—hoss thief, road-agent, runnygade, and everything else. Him an' his gang is the scorch of this yer country, by durn!"

"He means the scourge, don't he?" whispered Mr. Burwick, to the Kid, in great alarm.

"Guess he do, pop. Anyhow, the feller, whoever he is, must be a la-la."

"But how can there be road agents where there are no roads, Charlie?" asked Josiah, very much puzzled.

Before Charlie had time to solve this great problem, Texas Jake said to Shorty:

"Yes, pard, this yer Yaller Jim is the durndest robber whatever give the hangman the shake. He's a greaser, I reckon, and that's how they call him Yaller."

"What's a greaser?" asked Josiah.

"He's a Mexican, pard, and he was the last critter made. They was a lot o' yaller mud left, and they just tossed that up and made the fust greaser out of it. He married a coyote, and they've been growin' like rabbits ever since."

"Goodness me!" explained the Old Man. "Then this Yaller Jim and his men are regular bandits, and live in the mountains?"

"That's the size of it, sir, and the further we keep away from 'em by night, the better it'll be for we uns, you bet."

"Why, will they attack us?" gasped the Old Man.

"They mought, an' it's jest as well to get ready for 'em. They'd ruther come down on us when they thought we wasn't ready for 'em, but they'd come anyhow if they reckoned they had a bigger gang than we uns."

"Goodness me! what are you going to do about it, Jacob?"

"Nuthin', 'cept to get our guns and toothpicks ready. Reckon they won't care to bother us yet, not till we get a lot o' critters, though they mought, fer a grudge."

"A grudge?"

"Yas, a grudge. I shot away one of Yaller's eyes 'bout a year ago, and he's been 'lowin' he'd get hunk with me ever sence, 'long o' that."

"You shot away one of the villain's eyes, Jacob?"

"Yas, sir, clean as a knife."

"And didn't kill him?"

"Sho! them fellers has as many lives as a wildcat. Ye can't kill 'em, fust go, no more'n yer kin fly."

During this conversation the camp had been pitched, the horses and mules tethered and preparations made for spending the night on the spot.

They were in a valley, flanked on one side by the mountain, on another by the river, a low line of foothills bounding the horizon in front.

The mountains did not seem to be more than five miles away, a spur shooting out from the main chain to within a mile or so of them, when it abruptly ended.

"That there spur is one o' their hiding places," said Jake pointing to it. "It's the best kind of a shelter, for they kin rush out all of a sudden and pounce down upon yer afore yer know it."

"Is the band a very large one?" asked the Old Man apprehensively.

"'Bout a hundred ginerally, though they do say that Yaller has been gettin' in a lot of extry men lately, till he has more'n a thousand."

"More than a thousand! Good heavens!"

"Wall, I guess the figgers is a leetle bit stretched. Don't believe he's got more'n five hundred myself."

The Old Man thought that the lower estimate was still too large when the character of the men was considered.

"Five hundred robbers in an unsettled country like this!" he gasped. "What's to prevent our being all robbed and murdered?"

"Wall, we can kill forty or fifty o' the pesky skunks," said Jake, "even if we don't scare 'em off. They's some satisfaction in that."

The Old Man failed to see where it came in if he had to be killed, but he didn't say much.

The cowboys got ready for the expected visit from Yaller Jim and his band of outlaws, but as they had failed to put in an appearance by midnight the Old Man went to sleep in the fond belief that they would not arrive, for that night at least, and that he was safe for the present.

Vain hope!

Daylight had just come sneaking over the mountains, and as yet the camp lay in silence when, all at once, there was heard a terrible racket.

Josiah jumped up, chucked away his blanket and rushed to the door of his tent.

As he pushed aside the flap he was seized and dragged a dozen paces to a big, ugly-looking fellow, as yellow as a Chinaman, with one eye, who sat on a big, raw-boned mule.

A big green patch concealed one of his eyes, his hair reached to his waist, he had spurs nearly a foot long, and there were pistols enough in his belt to have furnished a small arsenal.

He wore a blue shirt, a velvet jacket, a tremendous hat, and a red scarf, and looked as fierce as a dozen heavy villains from the drama.

He was surrounded by a dozen or twenty fellows, all as fierce-looking as himself, and poof Josiah shook in his socks as he beheld them. This must be Yaller Jim and no one else.

There could be no doubt of it.

"Here's the old galoot wot has all the money, Jim," said one of the Old Man's captors.

"Fetch him along," growled the one-eyed bandit, with an awful scowl. "We'll git it out of him purty soon, I reckon."

Josiah tried to say that he was not worth a cent, but one of the men

clapped a gag in his mouth, another threw him across the back of a mule and then the whole gang dashed out of camp at a gallop.

What a ride that was!

The Old Man thought that every bone in his body would be broken.

The mule jumped about like a skiff in a storm, and at every jounce Josiah got a bump.

He did not like riding *a la Mazeppa* for a cent, but the outlaws didn't seem to care whether he did or not.

He had not been able to see whether Shorty and the Kid had been captured or killed, or if they had escaped, and he was in a fever of anxiety in consequence.

He could not yell and he could not look around him, and so he went on bumpety-bump until he thought the breath would be shaken out of him.

At last that awful ride came to an end and he was lifted off of the mule's back and taken into a rude hut about fifteen feet square, and placed on a bench in the corner.

Then Yaller Jim and his pals followed, but there were no other prisoners.

"Now, old man, where do you keep your boodle?" asked Jim.

"Oh, dear, I haven't any! I'm a poor man," sighed Josiah.

"That's a lie! You're worth ten millions, and we want ter know where you hide it."

"I ain't worth a dollar," cried Josiah.

"That won't do. We know you are well heeled, and we want the dust."

"Upon my word, I haven't any money, gentlemen. Ask Texas Jake and the rest."

"We did ask 'em afore we killed 'em. We searched the hall camp, too, but we couldn't find nothin'. Where do you keep yer stuff?"

"Did you kill Shorty, too?" gasped the Old Man.

"The little feller? Yes, we fed him to the turkey buzzards, 'cause he was no good."

"Oh dear, oh dear!" sighed the Old Man again.

"None o' that!" thundered that bad man from Bitter Creek. "Tell us where you've put yer dust."

"I haven't got but a few dollars in my breeches pocket, really I haven't."

"Too thin! Yer wuth ten millions, and we want it."

"I haven't got one half of a million, nor a hundredth part of that even."

"Won't wash, pard."

"But I haven't."

"Can't fool us."

"If a hundred dollars is any object——"

"Fetch out that keg, boys!" growled Jim.

Two of the men brought out a keg about a foot in diameter, and placed it on the floor in the middle of the room.

"Get up there!" commanded Yaller Jim to the Old Man.

Josiah obeyed, the top of the keg being just big enough for him to stand upon.

"Now, will you tell us where yer ten mlllions is?"

"I haven't got——"

"Fetch a torch, boys."

Half a dozen flaming torches were brought and placed about the keg, a foot away from it.

"Now, then, that 'ere kag is full o' gunpowder."

The Old Man groaned.

"If yer don't tell us where yer money is hid pretty quick, we'll blow yer to pieces."

"Oh, dear, oh, dear, it's all in New York, what there is of it, but I ain't worth anything like——"

"Shut up! Yer sugar is hid in the mountains and you've come out here to get it and take it home."

This was news to the Old Man.

"I haven't a penny in the——"

"Shut up! Dance us a jig."

"What!" gasped Josiah.

"Dance us a jig on that kag, or I'll put a pound o' lead into yer, durned sudden."

Dance a jig on the top of a keg!

It could not be done!

"I can't do it, I don't know how, there ain't room!" cried Mr. Burwick.

"Go ahead, I tell yer!" and Yaller Jim leveled his gun at the Old Man.

All the other bandits did the same.

The situation was growing desperate.

There was no help for it, however, and the Old Man began to dance. It was hard enough work dancing upon so small an area, but that was not the only trouble.

Josiah's bones all ached, and dancing was never much in his line, anyhow.

He knew he would fall before he had taken a dozen steps, and there were those blazing fire-brands, just beneath him.

However, something else fell first.

It was the keg.

It tumbled all to pieces before he had danced three steps.

Away he went, on the floor, and, as he rolled into a corner, he put his hands over his ears to shut out the sound of the explosion.

Of course the powder would be scattered over the torches and there would be the worst kind of a bust up.

The house would be wrecked, and he and the outlaws with it.

If he lay still he might escape, however, as the explosion would be upward.

He did lay still for several minutes, but there wasn't the least bit of a fuss.

Then he sat up and looked around him.

The bandits had fled to a man.

The busted keg lay in the middle of the floor, its shiny, black contents lying in a heap.

The torches had been put out, with one exception.

That lay dangerously near the pile of powder.

What little hair the Old Man had stood up like bristles.

Suppose that flame were to reach the powder?

Suppose!

It wasn't to be imagined!

Josiah Burwick made as rapid a movement as he had ever made in his life just then.

He got up, dashed over to the torch, and yanked it off the floor in a jiffy.

Then he started to throw it into the farthest corner, but did not.

Instead of that he suddenly tripped and sat down on the pile of powder, the lighted torch falling out of his hand.

He jumped up and saw the torch lying right on top of a lot of the stuff.

Was there any explosion?

Nixey!

Josiah was astonished.

He caught up two double handfuls of the stuff and threw it on the flames.

They went out.

"H'm! guess that's the kind o' powder the government furnishes to the Indians," he muttered, dazedly.

Then he examined it once more.

This time he took a tumble.

Black sand!

That's what was in the keg.

Did the outlaws know it?

Probably not, since they had all fled.

Oh, would he never get on to anything?

"The scoundrels have gone," he muttered. "I must hurry away before they come back."

Just then the door was thrown open and in rushed—

Shorty and the Kid!

"Saved, be all that's terrible!"

"Snatched from der jaws of destruction, by gum!"

Then those two little runts rushed up and hugged the Old Man till he thought he would be crushed.

"Hold on, hold on; don't hug so tight, boys."

"Why, yer've had der closest call dat ever was, pop, and we're showing how glad we are ter see yer alive agin."

"Dat was the narrerest squeeze a feller ever had, Ole Man. Don't yer think we'd orter be glad that you come out of it all hunk?"

"Yes, yes, but you needn't kill me with hugging. How did you get away? I thought you were dead."

Still he wouldn't tumble.

"Oh, we were so little dat dey thought we wasn't of no account, pop."

"And so they let you go?"

"Yes, so's we could play some more snaps on yer, pop," and Shorty fired about a peck of the bogus gunpowder over the Kid.

Just then Texas Jack, Arizona Charlie, Nevada Mike and Blue Nosed Jim came into the hut.

"We've routed that ere pirate and his hull gang," said Jake. "Me and Jim fit hand to hand, and I run my hand down his pesky throat and turned him inside out."

Then Josiah got onto the snap at last.

"This is another of your practical jokes, I suppose?" he growled, glaring at Shorty.

"It's got my label on it, pop, but Jake kind o' helped me out."

The Old Man glared at Jake, but said nothing.

"You're as bad as the rest," he said at last, as he turned away and left the house.

If he trusted to those cowboys to work any snaps on Shorty after that he would know it.

## CHAPTER VI.

THE Old Man felt pretty sore over the Yaller Jim joke, and would not speak to the perpetrators thereof for fully an hour.

He would get square on Shorty for that, if it took him a week, and he would not confide in Texas Jake either.

One sell was enough to teach him not to trust to the Texan again, and he resolved to follow his own counsel and work the thing out unassisted.

At first he thought that he would personate a wild Indian chief, get into Shorty's tent at night and scare blazes out of the young reprobate.

There were serious objections to this plan, however.

He was not tall enough for an Indian, even with the aid of a head-dress three feet high, a long robe and a tomahawk, all of which he could have procured.

Then again, Shorty had played the Indian racket himself, and would be liable to catch on in a moment.

The same objection held good in case he made himself up as an outlaw or road-agent, and so that was abandoned.

At last the puzzled Old Man hit upon an idea which he thought good.

It was not new, by any means, but it was usually successful.

In short, it was that ancient time honored, moss-grown, antediluvian old joke, the ghost snap.

Josiah was to be the ghost and Shorty the victim.

That is, he would be if everything worked well.

Josiah entertained no doubts upon that point.

During the evening, after supper, he got hold of an extra tent flap, procured some clay, and made it as white as white could be, for no well regulated ghost ever goes about in dirty clothes.

Then he got a pole and a candle, and was all ready to carry out his great scheme.

Shorty was just dropping off into a comfortable doze, when he heard a groan.

"Guess der Kid has got der stomach ache," he remarked.

"Knowed he would, if he ate so much of dat salt pig. It's too rich for his blood."

Presently there came another groan, louder and more long-drawn out than before.

"He has got it bad, for a fact. Well, he'll know better dan dat der next time."

Another groan.

"Great Caesar! Wish he'd shut up, and let a feller sleep."

More groans.

"Hi, Kiddy, stop that, or I'll chuck a boot at yer!"

Still more groans, and regular full-grown ones at that.

Shorty jumped up, and looked around for something to chuck at the disturber of his repose.

This was the Old Man's opportunity.

He hoisted up his pole, with a lighted candle on the top, and long white draperies hanging therefrom.

Then he groaned again, in a way calculated to freeze the blood in one's veins.

Shorty's blood did not freeze worth talking about.

He was startled, it was true, as any one might naturally be at the first moment.

"Oh, oh, oh!" said the tall white figure in the tent.

"Hallo, ghost," cried Shorty. "Where do you hail from?"

"From the gra-aa-aa-vel!" drawled the figure, waving to and fro, and causing the light to flicker.

"Oh, you do, hey? Why couldn't you stay there?"

"Because I want you, ohohohoh!" and the Old Man did his very prettiest in the groaning line.

"Can't come this eve, got a pressing engagement. See you later, ghost. Ta-ta, old Rawbones."

"You must come now, ohohohoh!" and the ghost advanced upon the young joker.

Shorty had meanwhile possessed himself of the boot which he had meant to shy at Charlie to stop his supposed groaning.

As the specter advanced upon him he took aim and let drive with all his might.

Whish!

The boot struck the candle on top of Josiah's pole and sent it flying.

Of course the light went out, but of that fact the Old Man was not aware, being enveloped in the white draperies of the ghost.

He kept right on, groaning with all his might and waving the pole back and forth.

Then Shorty let drive with the other boot.

This time the Old Man had something to groan for.

The heel of the boot took him in the eye and made him yell.

He dropped the pole and tried to run, but the draperies tripped him up.

Then Shorty sat down on him and called to the Kid to come and help.

"Here's a darned greaser has got in and is trying to steal all our dust, Chawles," cried Shorty.

The Kid came to his dad's assistance, and between them they gave the Old Man a fine old drubbing.

"Hold on, boys, it's me!" he yelled at last. "I made a mistake."

But they did not hear him or pretended not to, which was all the same, and kept up their pummeling like little men.

"I say, George, Charlie, stop that, it's me, hold up!" the Old Man yelled.

They each got in another crack, however, before they paused.

"Cheese it, Kiddy, it's der gov'nor," said Shorty, in great astonishment.

"Well, I'll be blowed if it ain't," answered Charlie as Josiah crawled out from under the tent cloth.

"Didn't you hear my voice?" sputtered Josiah as he stood up.

"What did you want to pound me so for, I'd like to know?"

"Why how was we to know it was you, pop?"

"Why, cert, we wasn't supposed to know you was a ghost."

"You could hear me holler, couldn't you?" snapped Josiah.

His little snap had failed, and he was now trying to get out of it as gracefully as possible.

"Why, cert. We heard you holler, but we didn't think it could be you, first off."

"What's the matter, anyhow, pop? What was you up to?"

"Why, I was tryng to scare Jake, and I must have got into the wrong tent."

"Oho, that was it, hey?"

"Trying to scare Jake, eh?"

"Yes."

"Playing off the ghost racket on him was you?"

"Yes."

"Making him think his last hour had come, eh?"

"That's it; funny, wasn't it?"

"And you got into the wrong tent?"

"Yes, oh yes, queer I should do it, too, wasn't it?"

"Oh, yes, very funny."

"It's lucky for you that you did get into the wrong tent, pop," said Shorty, seriously.

"How so, George?"

"Why, if you'd tried any funny business on Jake, he's so stupid that he wouldn't appreciate it."

"Not at first, of course, but he would afterwards."

"Maybe so, but you wouldn't enjoy the snap then."

"How so?"

"Because."

"That's no reason."

"Well, then, if you want to know I'll tell you."

"Go ahead."

"Well, if you went monkeying around Texas Jake's tent with any of yer ghost business, the first thing you'd know he'd out with his gun and shoot you full o' holes."

"No!"

"He might comprehend the joke after that, but I don't think you'd be able to explain it to him, pop."

"Do you think he'd do that?"

"Course he would, in a minute. He'd take you for a robber and let drive first thing."

"H'm! I'm glad I didn't go in there then," remarked Josiah with a long breath.

"Yes, it's just as well you didn't, pop. Some folks never can see a joke, you know."

"No," murmured the Old Man as he skipped out.

"Hi, pop!" called the Kid.

"Well, what is it?" asked Josiah, looking in.

"You forgot yer ghost's duds."

"Let them stay there."

"Oh, I thought you might like to work off the snap on some of the boys. They ain't all as good shots as Jake."

The Old Man growled out something in reply, but what it was the boys could not tell.

They gave him the laugh as he dusted, however, and made him feel as if life were a failure.

"That's another on his jiblets," remarked Shorty.

"Try to scare us with that old racket, eh? Well, he ought ter get clubbed for that."

"Yer can't expect an ole duffer like that is going to catch onto der newest snaps."

"Reckon not. He remembers der ones dat were going when he was a boy, and thinks they're just as fresh as ever."

"Oh, dey're fresh enough, Kid. He's full o' fresh jokes, der guy'nor is; dat's what ails him."

"Well, dat ghost snap was old when Adam was a baby, dad. If I'd played dat on him, you'd 've clubbed me for it."

"Cert, I would, and yer orter get clubbed if you couldn't get anything better dan dat."

Josiah, in the meantime, had gone back to his virtuous couch, very much disgusted with himself.

What was the use of going a couple of thousand miles away from home just to be made a butt of, the same as he always was?

He might just as well have remained where he was and saved the bother and expense of travel.

The next time he went anywhere he would take precious good care not to tell any one where he was going, not even his wife.

While he was engaged in thinking the thing over he fell asleep.

It was almost daylight when he awoke and saw something at the entrance of his tent.

It looked like a man, but he was not certain.

"Who's that?" he asked, sitting up.

There was no answer, and he tried to make out what the thing was again.

Could Shorty have been fixing up a ghost snap for him while he was asleep?

No, the thing wasn't dressed like the regular, everyday ghost, nor was it an Indian or an outlaw.

It was a man, but he must have been a tall one, for his head came to the top of the tent door.

"Who's that, I say?" snarled the Old Man.

Still there wasn't any answer, and the figure began to move.

"Get out of that or I'll fire!" exclaimed Mr. Burwick, feeling for his pistols under his pillow.

The apparition continued to swing back and forth, but came no closer.

"Get out or I'll shoot!" yelled the Old Man, getting mad.

Somebody was playing the same game on him that he had tried to work on Shorty, and he wasn't going to have it.

He yelled out another warning and then fired at the head of the strange object.

It did not seem to have moved, and yet the Old Man was sure he had hit it.

He fired again and several times after that, but still the object remained.

Finally he fired his last shot and down tumbled the object.

Then he jumped up and ran to see what it was.

Great Scott, it was a man!

Yes, a man, and he had been hanging by his neck in front of Josiah's tent.

That last bullet had cut the rope and down he fell.

"Goodness me, how long had he been hanging there, I wonder? Maybe he wasn't dead and I have killed him. Dear, dear, I'm tired of this dreadful country."

Texas Jake, Arizona Charlie, Nevada Mike, Shorty, the Kid and all hands now came running up to see what was the cause of the fusillade.

"What's up, pard?" asked Jake. "Been havin' a leetle target practice this mornin'? Wall, it was good of you to do it afore any of us was up, 'cause ye might have hit us 'stead o' the target."

"Oh, dad never misses," said Shorty, with a grin. "That is, not more than ten times out of eleven."

"I am afraid one of your men has hanged himself, Jacob," cried the Old Man. "I thought it was a joke and I fired, and now I'm afraid that I have killed the poor fellow before life was quite extinct."

"Is that so? Wall, let's have a look at the feller, and see who he is. I don't miss none o' the boys, and we hain't had no necktie sociables lately."

"What do you call a necktie sociable, for goodness sake?"

"That's when we string up a hoss thief, or a road agent."

"Maybe it's Yaller Jim," chuckled Arizona Charlie.

Jake now lifted the corpse from the ground, and held it up that all might see it.

It was the funniest kind of a dummy, and all hands just yelled when they saw it.

If it had been a little lighter in the tent the Old Man could not have been so easily fooled.

"Wall, I reckon he was dead afore ye peppered him," laughed Jake.

"Wonder ye didn't knock him all to bits with all them shots," said Blue Nosed Jim.

"Ye used up enough powder to blow him to blazes," added Nevada Mike. "His head is only cotton and sawdust."

"Better look for der bullets in der trees," said Shorty. "Guess you won't find any in dat thing."

"Pop couldn't hit a flock o' elephants," added the Kid, with a grin. "It was a mistake dat he hit der rope and fetched der thing down."

It was bad enough to have been fooled by the dummy, not to have one's bad marksmanship exposed as well, and the Old Man felt very weary.

"That's another of your stupid jokes, I suppose," he sputtered, turning to Shorty. "I should think that you would be so weary after that, that you would want to go off some place and die."

"That's pretty good for you, pop," retorted Shorty, "but dat snap hasn't got my trade mark on it. Looks more like dat ghost racket of yours."

"What was that?" cried all the cowboys. "We hain't heard of that. Tell us all about it."

"Shall I tell 'em, dad?" asked Shorty, with a broad grin.

"Oh, you make me tired!" cried Josiah, and then he went into his tent and stayed there till they were ready to break camp.

Nevada Mike had put the dummy up in front of the Old Man's tent to give Jake a scare, but Josiah's discovery of it had turned the joke upon another party, and of course it was that other party's usual luck to catch it.

"Fire at a man forty miles off and pop'll get hit," laughed George. "That's just his luck every time."

## CHAPTER VII.

HAVING played so many jokes on the Old Man it was but natural that Shorty and the cowboys would want to keep the thing up.

Josiah was getting wary, however, and took everything that was said to him with a liberal allowance of salt.

He wasn't being sucked in quite so easily as he had been.

Shorty perceived this, but he reckoned he could lay over the Old Man yet.

There was one of the cowboys called Dakota Dick, who had never said very much and had always impressed Josiah with being a very thoughtful man.

That was simply because Dick had nothing to say.

He was too lazy to play a joke on any one, but Josiah thought that it was because he knew more than the rest.

Dick knew enough to keep his fly-trap closed in order that folks would not know that he was a fool, and that was about all he did know.

He would sometimes open his head when he and Josiah were alone, but not at other times.

Therein he showed what little wisdom he had.

He thought that the Old Man was a bigger fool than he was, and that consequently it would be safe to talk to him.

Pretty rough on Josiah, that.

"That fellow they call Dakota Dick knows more than the whole lot together," said the Old Man to Shorty one day.

"Think so, pop?"

"Think so? I know he does."

"Well, I wouldn't wonder if he did," answered George.

He thought he saw his way to a good snap.

"Pop's getting suspicious of us fellers," he said to Charlie, when the two were alone.

"He has a right to be."

"Well, we've run him putty hard."

"Cert. He won't believe anything we tell him now."

"He's down on all the boys, too, and thinks they're all lying."

"Yes, he don't take stock in none of 'em."

"Except Dick."

"What? Dakota Dick?"

"That's the man."

"Why, he's a regular chump."

"Pop thinks he knows more'n the whole lot."

"Well, he must be away off then."

"Tell you something, Kiddy."

"Very well, tell it."

"If der Ole Man swears by dat feller, we've got der best chance going to soak him again."

"How's that, dad?"

"Post Dick, get him to stuff der Ole Man away up to the muzzle with some fairy story, and den we'll get in our fine work."

"Think Dick 'll have sand enough to do it, dad?"

"We'll fix dat all right."

"Den it's a go, dad."

Shorty consulted with Jake and one or two others, and the scheme was put under way at once.

"Dick 'll talk if we get him full of corn juice," said Texas Jake with a guffaw. "Just give him his p'int and he'll go till he runs down."

Dakota Dick was primed accordingly and, having the idea that Josiah was a chump, he was all the more willing to undertake the job of making a fool of him.

That evening, when they were all seated around the fire, Dick suddenly remarked:

"This yer's just the place where we struck them wild cats, bears, coyotes and snakes last spring—dumbed if it ain't!"

"Why, you don't find wild animals out here—do you, Mr. Richard?" asked Josiah.

"Wild animals! Well, I should hoot! Wild ain't no name for 'em. Just wait till you see 'em!"

"Yes, but I don't want to—"

"Snakes twenty foot long—bears, grizzlies, wolves what'll snap a cow in two at one bite—tigers, lions and all sorts of critters."

"Why, you don't have tigers in this country!"

"Wall, they ain't the reg'lar ones, o' course, but they're what we calls tigers down here. They're a specie o' wild cat, I reckon."

"Ain't you giving the old gent a stiff yarn, Dick?" interposed Jake.

"No, siree, dumbled if I am. You was never right in this purtic'lar spot, was yer?"

"No, but then——"

"Well, I was, and I know suthin' about it. You better look out to-night or all yer hosses 'll get run away with by them pesky beasts."

"Oh, they ain't no——"

"Wall, I tell ye they is. Any feller yer kin tell ye I never told a lie in my life."

"Yas, Dick, we know that."

"Wall, sir, I'm tellin' ye that right in this yer spot, last spring, I seed more wolves, bears and other kind o' varmints ye ever saw. They was b'ars and snakes——"

"What had ye been drinking, Dick?"

"Let him tell his story," said Josiah. "If we are in danger we ought to know it."

The Old Man had bitten.

"Wall, as I was sayin', they was b'ars fust, grizzly b'ars, cinnamon b'ars, brown, black, white and red b'ars, coyotes, wolves——"

"Red bears, did you say?" interrupted the Old Man.

"That's what I said, sir."

"Why, I never heard of red bears."

"Wall, they ain't a reg'lar red, to be sure, but that's what we call 'em, kind of brown b'ar I s'pose, only different."

"Well, go on."

"All these yer critters come a rushing down on us 'long to'ds mornin', and they was the wust kind of a stampede ye ever see."

"You don't say."

"Wall, I'm tellin' ye they was. Every hoss was chewed up or druv off, and some on us was lucky enough to catch it along o' the hosses."

"Gracious me!"

"I found a jack rabbit hole what they was no jack rabbit in, and clumb into it moighty sudden, and that's the only thing what saved me."

"Gracious me!"

"I tell ye them critters just skun everything clean down to bed rock, as we miners say. The heel o' my boot stuck out o' the hole, and them b'ars chewed it right off, and it full o' big nails, too, by durn!"

"Well, well!"

"Talk o' varmints, I wouldn't ha' stopped here to-night, if I'd thought, fur any money, but I reckon it's too late now to move camp."

"Ye're on'y lyin', Dick," said Mike.

"Won't change camp for all the b'ars in Texas," said Jake.

"That's only Dick's lies," added Jim.

"I don't believe it's a lie," said Josiah, "and I think you ought to take precautions, Jacob."

"Wall, we'll make up a bigger fire, sir, but ye won't see no b'ars nor nothin' else to-night."

"Just you wait and see," said Dick, and then he subsided, Jake having given him the tip to shut up.

The Old Man was pretty well scared, and did not want to go to bed at all that night.

"Have you lighted any more fires, Jacob?" he said to the boss cowboy when it became late.

"Oh, yes, four or five of 'em. Reckon them wild beasts won't come to-night, sir."

"I don't know about it, Jacob."

"Ye don't want to swallow everthing that Dakota Dick says. He's a liar from Wayback."

The more Jake said, however, the more the Old Man believed that Dick was a little George Wash and wouldn't tell a lie for a fortune.

"You ought to be prepared for an emergency, boys," he said to Shorty and the Kid. "We might be all carried off by the wild beasts."

"Yer didn't let that liar stuff yer up, did yer, pop?"

"Oh, dat ole duffer'll believe anything."

"I don't believe he would lie half so soon as Jake and the rest," sputtered Josiah.

Well, after awhile, despite his anxiety, the Old Man got terribly sleepy and finally turned in, though not until he had gone around the

camp and had seen that there were lots of men on guard, that extra fires had been lighted and that everything was secure.

He turned in then with an easy mind and was soon sleeping the slumbers of the innocent.

How long he had been asleep he did not know, but he was suddenly awakened by the most terrible yelling he ever heard.

It sounded as if a whole menagerie had broken loose and was serenading him.

Cats, dogs, bears, wolves, jackasses, tigers, elephants, and every other known bird, beast and fish were joining their voices just outside his tent.

Such a barking, yelping, hissing, roaring and howling was never heard outside of Noah's ark.

"Oh, dear, oh, dear! they have come!" cried Josiah, jumping up. "I knew it—I knew it! Where are my guns? Where is anybody? George—Charlie, where are you?"

The noise increased, and the menagerie seemed to be trying to get into the tent.

The flap was violently shaken, and all around the edges scratching noises were heard, while the other sounds increased in violence.

"Oh, dear—oh, dear! they'll get in, I know they will! Why can't I find my gun? George—Charlie, where are you? Why don't you come and help your poor father? Oh, good Lord! they're coming in!"

Growls and roarings were heard right under his feet, and it seemed to the Old Man as if the whole tent was about to come down.

He gave one yell and rushed outside, a revolver in each hand, resolved to sell his life dearly.

If the whole place had been suddenly sunk forty fathoms below the bottom of the sea, it could not have been more death-like in its stillness.

You couldn't hear a sound where before all had been noise and confusion.

Why, if one could pick up and feel of silence, it was just that kind, it was so heavy.

It hung over the camp like a weight, and Josiah thought he would go crazy if he couldn't hear a noise of some kind.

Just then a snore broke the stillness.

It was a welcome sound, and the awful spell was gone.

"I don't understand it," mused the Old Man, walking over toward the fire, where a man sat on a pork barrel, nodding. "Just now the place was full of wild beasts, but now I can't see one."

When he came to the silent sentinel he tapped the fellow on the shoulder, and said:

"Hey, you man, have they been driven off?"

"Huh!" said the man.

"Have you driven 'em off?"

"Hav' I druv what off?"

"The wild animals."

"What wild animals?"

"Why, the bears and wolves, and the wild cats and coyotes, and tigers and snakes, and all the rest that were here just now."

"Here in this camp?"

"Yes."

"When was it?"

"Just now."

"Wild animals?"

"Yes."

"I ain't seen none. Guess you're drunk, Old Man."

"No, sir, I don't get drunk. I tell you I heard them and saw them trying to get in my tent."

"Sure?"

"Of course."

"Take yer oath?"

"Certainly."

"Ho, ho! Then yer a bigger fool 'n I thought ye was, and I'll get a bottle o' rum out o' this business."

The man gave the fire a poke, the flames flew up, and the sentinel proved to be Dakota Dick, the only truthful man in the crowd.

Josiah was paralyzed.

Dick's laugh was suddenly echoed by a dozen more, and from different hiding-places out came Shorty, the Kid, Texas Jake, Arizona Charlie, Nevada Mike, Blue Nosed Jim and the whole gang.

All hands imitated some animal, and the din was something frightful.

"How's this, pop?" asked Shorty.

The Old Man tumbled.

"It's lucky for you that you stopped yelling so suddenly," sputtered Josiah, "for I was going to shoot in a second."

"Shoot now, pop."

"Bet you can't knock a leaf off the tree."

The Old Man raised his gun and pulled the trigger.

Snap!

He did that six times, and that's all the noise he made.

The balls had been taken out of the pops, and they were useless.

Josiah felt very sick.

"Sold again!" cried the cowboys.

"And by the biggest fool in the whole lot," added Texas Jake.

"H'm! I don't think there's much to choose between the whole of you," growled the Old Man, as he went off.

There were no more nocturnal disturbances, but it was a long time before the cowboys got over laughing.

As for Josiah, he resolved that he would not stay another day in the camp, but he changed his mind afterward.

## CHAPTER VII.

A DAY or so after this latest snap on the Old Man, Texas Jake and the larger portion of the party went off to drive in a lot of cattle, leaving the Shortys in camp.

This was too good an opportunity for Shorty and the Kid to lose.

They cared nothing for driving in a lot of cattle, while they did enjoy making it agreeable for the Old Man.

Josiah was thinking of the same thing, however, and making up his mind to get hunk for once.

The boys had enjoyed seeing him ride, and now he would show them how it felt to go through the same circus.

After dinner the boys were going to take a ride, and had asked Josiah to go with them, intending to put up a job on him at the same time.

On this occasion the Old Man came under the string a nose ahead.

The horses were already saddled, and the Old Man slipped around without being noticed and placed a good-sized carpet tack under the saddle of each, in such a way that the point would not penetrate unless some one got on the steed's back.

The tacks he found among the stores, and the idea he got out of his own fertile brain, with no thanks to anybody for the suggestion.

"Well, boys, are you ready for your ride?" he asked, after Shorty and the Kid had smoked their cigars.

"Why, cert, we're ready for anything, pop."

"Course we are, grandpop. Did you ever see us when we wasn't ready for fun?"

"I hope you'll get enough of it this time," thought Mr. Burwick.

Shorty winked at the Kid, and both grinned behind the Old Man's back.

"Come along, then," said Josiah. "Jump on, boys."

They jumped, the Old Man standing by his nag watching them.

Then there was a circus!

The antics those horses went through would have made a cat die of laughing.

They kicked and they pranced and they snorted and chucked up their heels as though they meant to knock the spots out of the sun.

"Bronchos, hey," muttered Shorty. "Well, I guess I can hold on as long as they kin."

"Kick, yer beggar!" remarked the Kid. "I'm little, but I kin hold on as long as der next feller."

They thought that the Old Man had given them a pair of buckers to ride, to pay up for the joke on him.

Consequently they determined to stick.

It was custard pie for the Old Man, and he laughed till he couldn't see for the tears in his eyes.

The more he laughed the more the boys were determined to hold on. First the horses would rear and snort and then go plunging forward.

Then they would try to lie down and roll over, but the boys stuck to them like wax.

It was a circus, picnic, hippodrome and minstrel show combined.

The cowboys thought it was great fun and encouraged the boys to keep it up.

Finally both nags made a bolt, dashed out of camp at full gallop, and left the shouting cowboys far behind.

A mile away they suddenly stopped on the banks of a little run, put down their noses, and sent their riders flying.

It was well for the latter that the water was deep.

If it had not been their little necks would have been cracked.

Then the nags gave a snort and started back towards the camp.

The goods gave them no further trouble, the pressure being removed.

Shorty and Charlie picked themselves out of the water and stood looking at the departing nags.

"Soy, pop?"

"Well, Kiddy?"

"I've got an idea."

"Same here."

"I'll bet dat der guv'nor——"

"Just what I'm thinking."

"Do you suppose he got onto it?"

"Guess he must have."

"Dis time he's got der best of us."

"Yes, sir, sure."

Then those sorrowful little runts started to walk back to camp.

It wasn't half so much fun as riding.

"Pop has done for us dis time and no error, dad."

"Yes, der Ole Man has given us some of our own pudding."

The horses got back long before their former riders did, and the cowboys wondered what had happened.

"Don't know what made 'em cut up so," said one. "They never did so before."

"Guess I can tell you," said Josiah.

Then he raised the saddles and took out the tacks.

"Well, I swan!" cried the cowboys in chorus.

Suddenly a thought seemed to strike the Old Man.

He raised his own saddle, and there, where he had put the tacks on the boys' horses, was a well-developed spike all ready to give his nag a dig as soon as he got aboard.

"H'm!" he remarked, as he threw the dangerous weapon away, "I got ahead of 'em this time, anyhow."

Then he jumped into the saddle and went out to meet the boys as they came in.

"Had lots of fun, have you?" he asked.

"Oh, lots. How does yer mule like it?"

"Immense. He always has a spike under his saddle."

"That's one on us, pop," said Shorty.

"Got in ahead dis time, Old Man," snickered the Kid, "but just you wait till we come up to the bat."

"You'll get left," said Josiah, with a grin.

"All right, but you just wait."

A week or so later, the Old Man, having found that there was not so much fun in a life in the Wild West as he supposed there was, concluded to go home.

"You can stay if you like," he said to Shorty and the Kid, "but I have had enough of it."

Let the Old Man go home without them!

Well, they reckoned not.

Life had no charms for them, unless he was along to take a hand in the fun.

He might not be altogether satisfied with the part he took, but that was his misfortune, and not their fault.

On the following day they met a party going to San Antonio, and the Shorty tribe joined it, Josiah being unable to shake Shorty and the Kid.

"I only wanted to go so as to get rid of 'em," he muttered, "and now they must follow me around as if I was a baby, and didn't know how to take care of myself."

From San Antonio they went to Galveston, and concluded to go thence by boat instead of by rail to New York.

"It'll be nicer that way, pop," said Shorty. "We won't be knocked about so much and we'll have more room to turn around in."

Accordingly they bought their tickets, went aboard, and began the last stage of their journey.

Going across the Gulf was all right, but when they struck the Atlantic it was all wrong.

Josiah became terribly sick and moaned like a stuck pig.

"Oh, dear, oh, dear! I wish I had brought Ginger along," he wailed.

Shorty knew that he meant the coon, but he interpreted the remark otherwise, just for the fun of it.

"Just you wait a shake, pop, and I'll fix you up something that'll make you feel all hunk," said the little runt, giving Charlie a wink.

Then he went off and got the steward to concoct him a mixture of hot water, sugar, ginger and everything else hot that he could lay hands on.

It was hot enough to scald the stomach of a brass image, though it looked innocuous enough.

"Here, pop, take dis and you'll feel better," he observed as he came up with the dose.

"What is it, George?" asked the Old Man.

"Just what you want, pop."

Josiah was hardly able to sit up, and so Charlie held him while Shorty made him drink.

At the first swallow he gave a gasp and a yell and tried to get away.

"Great guns! what's that?"

"Ginger, pop. You said you wished you had it."

"Take it away!" howled Josiah. "I meant my man Ginger."

"Well, this is strong enough for a man, pop."

Then the Kid held on to him and Shorty made him take another big swallow of the hot stuff.

"Ow—ow! Stop, it's burning a hole clear through me," he howled.

"Dat's der best kind of ginger, pop. You'd better have some more."

"'Tain't ginger pop," said the Kid, "it's ginger tea. Don't yer know der difference?"

"Put it down, whatever it is," roared Josiah.

"All right, governor, we're trying to put it down, but you won't let us."

Then they forced that wretched Old Man to drink about a pint more of the seething stuff, though the tears streamed out of his eyes and the sweat ran off him in bucketfuls.

"Stop—stop! I won't drink any more!" he howled, trying to get up.

He succeeded, rushed to the door and out on deck, and presently came back wiping his mouth.

"Dat ginger was as good as der coon, wasn't it, pop?"

"Want some more? Dere's plenty left."

"No! Get out of here!"

"For two pins I'd make you drink a quart of der stuff," said Shorty, with a laugh.

"Let's do it, dad, just for fun," chuckled the Kid.

"Der next time you call for Ginger Jones you'll get ginger hot," said Shorty. "Guess we can take as good of you as dat moke."

"Let's give him some more just for greens, dad."

But Shorty concluded that the Old Man had had enough, and he went out laughing at his latest joke.

The hot stuff did the old man good, for all that, for it made him sweat, drove away his fever and gave him the appetite of a horse.

The next morning he took his seat at the table and ate as much as anybody, and said nothing more about being sick all the rest of the voyage.

"Nothing like ginger, hey, pop?" asked Shorty, laughing at the recollection of how the Old Man had danced and skipped around with that hot stuff in his inside pocket.

"Oh, go to thunder!" snapped Mr. Burwick. "You boys are never happy unless you're playing jokes on somebody."

"Dat's der fault of our bringing up, pop. You ought to taught us different."

"I ought! Well, I like that," and the laugh that followed made the Old Man madder than ever.

[THE END.]

PETER PAD, the author of this story, is also the author of all the SHORTY stories published in THE WIDE AWAKE LIBRARY.

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